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Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives
First session
New York, 17–28 May 1999
Items 3 and 4 of the provisional agenda*
Preliminary review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development
Consideration of further actions and initiatives to implement the commitments made at the Summit

Contributions from relevant organs, funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Contribution from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

The Secretariat circulates herewith for the information of the Preparatory Committee the attached report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which is available in English only.

* A/AC.253/5.

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Annex

FAO contribution for the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and further initiatives

The World Food Summit

The contribution of FAO to the implementation of the Social Summit is integrated with the actions taken by the Organization and the mechanisms established to coordinate UN System-wide activities in the follow-up to the World Food Summit (WFS)

The complementarity of the objectives and activities of the WFS Plan of Action and the World Summit for Social Development are rooted in the strong link between rural poverty, hunger and food insecurity. At the World Food Summit the Heads of State and Government declared that "Poverty is a major cause of food insecurity and sustainable progress in poverty eradication is critical to improve access to food". Both the WFS and the WSSD agree that poverty, hunger and malnutrition continue to be concentrated in rural areas throughout much of the developing world. Of the 720 million people classified as poor by the World Bank, 75% live in rural areas where they depend primarily on agriculture directly or indirecdy as their principal livelihood, source of income and employment, as well as for the betterment of their conditions. The WFS Plan of Action and WSSD share common objectives and strategies for poverty eradication through the implementation of income generation, and employment creation programmes.

To this end the WFS Plan of Action states the following relevant objectives (para 2.1) "To pursue poverty eradication, among both urban and rural poor, and sustainable food security for all as a policy priority and to promote, through sound national policies, secure and gainful employment and equitable and equal access to productive resources such as land, water and credit, so as to maximise the incomes of the poor" and "To adopt policies that create conditions which encourage stable employment, especially in rural areas, including off-farm jobs, so as to provide sufficient earnings to facilitate the purchase of basic necessities, as well as encourage labour intensive technologies where appropriate."

Further, reinforcing shared views and common objectives of recent international conferences, the World Food Summit Plan of Action recognized that "Reaching sustainable world food security is part and parcel of achieving the social, economic, environmental and human development objectives agreed upon in recent international conferences" and builds on consensus reached in these fora. The Plan of Action urges "governments, in partnership with all actors of civil society" to "review and adopt policies to pursue the eradication of hunger and attain sustainable food security at the household and national levels as a top policy priority, and make every effort to eliminate obstacles such as unemployment and lack of access to factors of production that adversely affect the attainment of food security," and to "implement the relevant commitments they entered into at the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995".

In this context it can be observed that FAO's activities in the follow-up to the World Food Summit complement the outcome of the major UN conferences and summits held in recent years such as the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)

Inter-agency collaboration in support of WFS follow-up

In April 1997, the Administrative Committee on Coordination of the United Nations (ACC) endorsed the proposal by FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to establish the ACC Network on Rural Development and Food Security. The Network replaces the former ACC Subcommittee on Rural Development and constitutes the mechanism for inter-agency follow-up to the WFS.

At the country level, the Network consists of Thematic Groups on rural development and food security established within the UN Resident Coordinator System. Thematic groups already created or under formation in 75 countries typically include the participation of national institutions, bilateral donors and representatives of civil society in addition to UN organizations and are engaged in supporting concrete national activities to promote food security and rural development.

At the headquarters level, the Network includes 20 interested UN organizations which participate in and support the country-level groups. The Network is being jointly coordinated and backstopped by FAO and IFAD in close cooperation with WFP. The Network has an Internet site and is also using other new information technologies (including e-mail list servers) to promote information exchange and foster interactive networking among countries and regions, and between Network members at all levels.

Food security, poverty alleviation and rural development activities

FAO's programme of work has been focused on the overall goal of eradicating hunger and food insecurity, a process that involves most of the programmes of the Organization which aim at improving standards of living and food security, particularly for the rural poor, who depend upon agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries activities for their livelihood. Emphasis has been put on providing assistance to the Low-Income, Food Deficit Countries (LIFDCs). In 1994 FAO launched the Special Programme on Food Security (SPFS) which aims at helping LIFDCs to improve their national food security through rapid increases of agricultural production and productivity in an environmentally-sustainable and socially equitable way, particularly focusing on small farmers who are often among the poorest segments of the population.

FAO made a detailed analysis of the food situation in the least developed countries (LDCs) and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) and how these countries have been affected by the sharp price increases during 1995/96 and by reductions in the level of concessional food availability in recent years. It was observed that the food import bills of the NFIDCs and of the LDCs rose by US$ 200 million to reach US$ 7.2 billion in 1997/98 which, although lower than the high level of US$ 8.0 billion in 1995/96 is still much higher than the 1994/95 level of US$ 5.9 billion.

The development of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS), a cooperative inter-agency effort called for by the World Food Summit, has been actively pursued with FAO serving as permanent secretariat to an Inter-agency Working Group on FIVIMS. Guidelines for establishment of FIVIMS at national level were submitted to the 24th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 1998.

FAO contributed towards the development of efficient emergency response mechanisms through the Global Early Warning and Food Information System (GIEWS.) An important channel used for bilateral and multi-lateral rehabilitation programmes is the provision, through FAO, of agricultural inputs to rehabilitate farmers in post-emergency situations.

As part of the follow-up to WFS and the International Conference on Nutrition, FAO continued to support national food and nutrition plans and policies, established or reinforced in 106 countries. Aspects of particular relevance to the poor and vulnerable, such as street foods, urban and peri-urban agriculture, supply and distribution of food in the cities, and community nutrition programmes, have been subject of studies, recommendations and action by relevant units in the Organization.

In 1997, the FAO Conference and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted resolutions in support of the implementation of the WFS objective to "clarify the content of the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, as stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other relevant international and regional instruments, and to give particular attention to implementation and full and progressive realization of this right as a means of achieving food security for all". To this end, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Director-General of FAO and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

In support of the mandate given to the Committee on World Food Security to monitor progress in implementation of the WFS Plan of Action, FAO elicited reports from governments, UN agencies and other relevant international institutions on their action until end 1997 in implementing the Plan of Action. Reports from more than 100 countries and 33 international institutions were received and submitted to the CFS at its 24th Session. Many developing countries reported that their main policy priority was the eradication of poverty and achievement of sustainable food security for all. While policies and programmes to eradicate poverty were generally a continuation of the past, several countries have initiated new actions as a follow-up to the WFS. Several LIFDCs referred to the FAO-supported Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) as part of their strategy to alleviate poverty.

Other FAO-supported poverty alleviation programmes often include concrete measures to enhance participatory development of local institutions of the poor, empowerment of weak and vulnerable rural people, and formation of small groups and community-based organizations. Other programmes are aimed at enhancing access to land and/or security of tenure, as well as development of infrastructure and basic social services, land improvement through irrigation, access to credit, marketing, processing and development of storage facilities. Expansion of employment opportunities through promotion of labour intensive rural projects is also pursued to tackle poverty.

In the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, FAO formulated its own "Plan of Action for Women in Development (1996-2001)" which seeks to stimulate growth with equality, while reducing rural poverty and achieving food security, through the provision of adequate and equitable access to productive resources and essential supporting services to both rural women and men. The Plan responds to the follow-up to the World Food Summit (WFS) as

well as the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) by focusing on the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes that reduce or eliminate legislative and administrative, as well as socio-economic obstacles to productive resources for rural women.

To this end, FAO offers technical support services and policy advice to Member Nations, covering a wide range of activities that seek to integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policy-making and planning activities. Such activities include provision of advice on institutional capacity building, generation of reliable gender-disaggregated statistical databases, holding workshops, undertaking research, conducting training courses, and provision of methodological tools for the analysis of socio-economic and gender issues.